From the Editor's Notebook: The Major Prophets

W. Ross Rainey

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Isaiah

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Major Prophets

Isaiah: The Book of Judgment and Peace

Key Word: Salvation.

Message: “The Unquenchable Love of God” (Eric W. Hayden).1 Key Verse: Isaiah 53:5 — “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.”

Introduction

The name Isaiah means “Jehovah is salvation” or “salvation of Jehovah.” This is the theme of the book, the word “salvation” occurring more times than anywhere else in the Bible except for the Psalms. Isaiah is an illustration of 1 Peter 1:10-12, himself having been called “The Fifth Evangelist,” “The Prophet of Redemption,” “The Evangelical Prophet,” and “The Messianic Prophet.” His prophecy has been referred to as “The Gospel According to Isaiah,” since he presents such a clear view of the grace of God.

Isaiah was the son of Amoz (1:1). It may be that he was a royal prophet, the best tradition contending that his father was King Joash and his brother King Amaziah. There is still another tradition that the reference in Hebrews 11:37 — “they were sawn asunder” — refers to Isaiah’s death, and that it was King Manasseh who had

God’s noble prophet put to death in this horrible fashion. One thing is certain, the so-called higher critics have “sawn asunder” Isaiah on the issue of his being the human author of this great prophecy. They have fabricated the theory that there were several Isaiahs, putting forth the idea that the book was produced by “ghost writers” whom they have called “Deutero-Isaiah” and “Trito-Isaiah.” However, the New Testament will not allow such treatment, for in it the book of Isaiah is quoted from all sections, giving credit to only one Isaiah. Furthermore, additional weight has been given to the case for a single authorship in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. One of the scrolls is the book of Isaiah, this particular manuscript being a thousand years older than any other known manuscript of any Hebrew Old Testament book. In this scroll there is no break between the end of chapter 39 and the beginning of chapter 40. In fact, chapter 40 begins on the last line of the page, indicating that the copyist found no break in the manuscript, or change of author at this point.

Except for chapters 36-39, Isaiah’s prophecy is all poetry, being one of the most beautiful and sublime of all the prophetical writings. Isaiah has been called the greatest of the prophets, both he and Job being poets of superlative greatness. The book abounds in metaphors (e.g., 2:19 —”caves of the rocks … holes of the earth”; 24:20 — “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a booth”).

The man Isaiah possessed a strong personality, had great influence, became a stateman, married one who shared the prophetic gift, had two sons (7:3; 8:3, 18), served for 60 years, and at 120 years of age probably died a martyr’s death.

Isaiah received his call in the last year of Uzziah's reign (756 B.C.), and he continued until the time of Hezekiah, a period of not less than 40 years. His contemporaries were Hosea and Micah. The scene of Isaiah's labors was chiefly Jerusalem. He prophesied under the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The first period of his ministry was in the reigns of Uzziah (783-738 B.C.) and Jotham (750-738 B.C. as regent, and 738-735 B.C. as sole ruler), in which he preached repentance but without any response from his hearers. Consequently, he had to proclaim judgment and banishment. The second period extended from the beginning of Ahaz's reign (735-719 B.C.) to the reign of Hezekiah, while the third period began with the accession of Hezekiah (719-705 B.C.) to the fifteenth year of his reign. After this Isaiah took no further part in public affairs, although he lived to the commencement of Manasseh's reign. This was in the 687 B.C. and, traditionally, it was at this time that Manasseh had Isaiah "sawn asunder."

In his ministry Isaiah stressed the spiritual and the social. He struck hard at the root of the nation's trouble — namely, apostasy and idolatry, and he sought to save Judah from its moral, political and social corruption. However, he failed to turn the nation back to the Lord, his divine commission having carried the warning that this would be the case (6:9-12). Thereupon he boldly predicted the fall of Judah and the preservation of a small godly remnant (6:13). Through this small remnant he prophesied that worldwide redemption would be available through the promised Messiah at His first Advent(9:2, 6; 53:1-12; etc.). At Messiah's Second Advent, Isaiah predicted that national salvation and

restoration for Israel would result (2:1-5; 9:7; 11:1-6; 35:1-10; 54:11-17). Thus throughout his great book there are radiant gleams of confident hope.

Outline

1. The Prophetic Condemnation (1-35)

2. The Historic Confiscation (36-39)

3. The Messianic Consolation (40-66)

Notable Notes

Augustine asked Ambrose which of the sacred books was the best to be studied after his conversion, and the latter's answer was, "Isaiah."

With its 66 chapters, Isaiah is a sort of miniature Bible with its 66 books. Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet, and in fact he is quoted nearly as often as all the other prophets put together.

For nearly 1,900 years no one ever questioned or doubted that Isaiah was the sole author of his prophecy, there being definitely a similarity of style throughout the entire book.

The expression, "the Holy One of Israel," is peculiarly Isaiah's, being found only a few times elsewhere in the Bible (Psa. 71; 78; 79; Jer. 50; 51; and 2 Kings 19:22, where Isaiah is the speaker).

Isaiah stands midway between Moses and Christ, and he commences to prophecy 217 years after the division of the United Kingdom of Israel, his ministry including the last years of the Northern Kingdom.

It is important and instructive to thoughtfully contemplate such things as: Isaiah's hint of the Trinity

(6:8); the marginal rendering of 26:4 and 59:15; the prophecy concerning the end of war (2:4; 11:9; 14:7); the book's three "Blesseds" (30:18; 32:20; 56:2); the Lord as King of Israel (6:5; 44:6; 43:15); and the remnant of Israel to be saved (1:25-27; 2:2-3; 6:13; 11:11; 18:7; 27:12-13; etc.).

The topical method of study reaps rich rewards in the book of Isaiah. For example, there are seven "everlasting" things: salvation (45:17); light (60:19); joy (35:10); strength (26:4); kindness (54:8); covenant (55:3); and judgment (33:14). Also, the Lord Jesus Christ's life can be traced from its pages: His birth (7:14; 9:6); His family (11:1); His anointing (11:2); His character (11:3-4); His simplicity of life (7:15); His gentleness (42:1-4); His death (52:13 - 53:12); His resurrection (25:8; 53:10); and His glorious reign (11:3-16; 53). In addition, consider Isaiah's teaching about the Holy Spirit (10:27; 11:2; 32:15; 40:7, 13; 42:1; 44:3; 59:19, 21; 61:1; 63:10), and his teaching regarding comfort (40:1; 51:3, 12; 56:13; 61:2, 3, 12; 63:9; see also 43:1-2; 50:10).

Isaiah 40-66 has been called "one of the finest poems existing in any language."

F. B. Meyer has discerningly observed that the prophet's aim in chapters 40-66 is to engage the Israelites in their exile by showing that the Lord is sovereign and, as a result, no obstacle will be able to prevent the ultimate restoration of Israel and the overthrow of their enemies. In accomplishing His will, God uses the following agents:

1. Cyrus, "one from the East" (41:2), who is called "my shepherd"(44:28) and Jehovah's "anointed" (45:1), and

who became God's instrument in overthrowing Babylon and delivering Israel from exile.

2. The "Servant of Jehovah." In several passages the nation of Israel is referred to as the "Servant of Jehovah" (41:8; 44:1-2, 21), but in many others the personal, suffering "Servant of Jehovah" is beautifully portrayed as God's instrument in the redemption of Israel and in the in-gathering of the Gentiles. Through Christ, the Messiah, God will fulfill His promise to Abraham, culminating in an endless kingdom of peace and righteousness.2

Special Note

On the evening of February 1st, 1985, several of the "Food for the Flock" committee brethren met together in the home of Bill and Joan Hamilton (our treasurer and business manager, respectively) at Mississauga, Ontario. At our previous Annual Meeting last October 27th in Toronto, serious consideration had been given to ceasing publication of the magazine at the close of 1985. It was then suggested that we table any definite decision for three months and during that time prayerfully spread the matter before the Lord. During those months, He has been pleased to encourage our hearts in a number of ways. Thus under our Lord's good and guiding hand, and with a sense of renewed commitment, it is our united decision to continue to publish the magazine.

In faith having made this decision, it does not mean that we are without problems. Financially, we fluctuate in and out of the red, this being indicative of the narrowness of our yearly budget. Perhaps our reader friends, many of whom decried the possible demise of "Food for the Flock," would take it upon themselves to

introduce the magazine to others. Also, if local assemblies would take a bulk subscription of 5, 10 or 25 copies (as some do) to distribute among those in fellowship, this is still another way of furthering the magazine and at the same time encouraging those of us who are responsible for its continued publication.

Please include “Food for the Flock” and its editor in your prayers as we seek through this written avenue of ministry to exalt our Lord Jesus Christ and to edify His saints. In advance we sincerely thank you for your helpful support.

—The Editor

1 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching through the Bible, p. 105.

2 F. B. Meyer, Through the Bible Day by Day, IV, p. 46.

Jeremiah

From the Editor's Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of The Major Prophets

Jeremiah: The Book of Judah's Failure

Key Word: Backsliding (13 times; used nowhere else in the King James translation of the Bible except once in Proverbs and three times in Hosea).

Message: "The certainty of God's judgment because of sin, yet the tenderness and eternity of the love of God."1
Key Verse: Jeremiah 3:22 —"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord, our God."

Introduction

Alexander Whyte said of Jeremiah that "this book stands to this day second only to The Psalms as the most spiritual book in the Old Testament." While many may disagree with W. W. White, the famous American expositor, he maintains that "sofar as we have data for judgment, Jeremiah was the healthiest, youngest, bravest, grandest man of Old Testament history." Jeremiah has been called "the weeping prophet" and "the prophet of the broken-hearted." But he was more than a prophet, having been a priest by birth (1:1). In addition he became a statesman, a patriot and, according to Christian tradition, a martyr.

However, there is the Jewish affirmation that when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt, he, with Baruch, escaped to Babylon and died there in peace.

Jeremiah was chosen of God before his birth (1:5), and as a youth he was called to the prophetic office. Unlike many of the other prophets, he has given us considerable information about himself, hence the autobiogaphical element in his book. Jeremiah's harsh message of judgment, wherein he predicted Judah's 70 years' captivity, never won a convert, though he delivered his message with tears. Not only was his message unwelcome to the nation, it was totally rejected by a backsliding people. As a man, Jeremiah was self-conscious, timid, sensitive, sympathetic, faithful, fearless, plaintive, retiring, tender, severe and patient. His courage and loyalty were such that, as one has said, "He faced misrepresentation, persecution, the dungeon and death, rather than keep back one word of truth."

Jeremiah, like Isaiah, was linked with nobility as evidenced by his intimacy with the Jewish kings of his day, having prophesied during the last period of Judah's national history, involving the reigns of the kingdom's final five kings — the good King Josiah and his three wicked sons and grandson, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, respectively. In the prophetic office he was preceded by Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Nahum, and he was contemporary with Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Obadiah in the Land and, for a while, with Ezekiel and Daniel in the East. What Isaiah was to Hezekiah, Jeremiah was to Josiah (see 2 Kings 22-25; 2 Chron. 34-35). His call and commission are recorded in 1:9-10; he was commanded riot to marry (16:1-4); his ministry began in 627 B.C. and

extended more than 40 years until Judah's captivity in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar; he was utterly rejected by his family (12:6) and his own townsmen who plotted against him (11:19; see 18:18; 20:1-3, 26); he wanted to resign, but could not (20:9); he was broken-hearted (9:1); and, like Paul and Silas, he was put in stocks (20:1-3), assaulted, suffered imprisonment on various occasions (37:2-15; 38), and later on was forced to go with the remnant to Egypt, having witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity. Tradition relates that he was stoned to death.

Jeremiah was virtually alone in the world, craving love which he never received. As a sufferer perhaps no other Bible personality comes so near to the Man of Sorrows, the Lord Jesus Christ, nor do any of the other prophets come so near to us in a human way as does Jeremiah. God chose him to carry out his thankless but necessary task because it takes a tender-hearted man to deliver such a stern message of judgment.

Outline

1. The Call and Mission of Jeremiah (1)

2. The Consistent Ministry of Jeremiah (2-51)

3. The Captivity of Judah (52)

Notable Notes

Of Jeremiah, W. Graham Scroggie has summarily said: "This book yields to none in the Bible in its intensely human interest. There is a BIOGRAPHICAL interest: the characters of the period — Jeremiah, Baruch, Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, Necho, Nebuchadnezzar. There is HISTORICAL interest: the stirring events of the period

— finding the Book of the Law, the Reformation, Battles of Megiddo and Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah, Jeremiah's Rolls and Jehoiakim's Vandalism, Destruction of Jerusalem. There is PROPHETICAL interest — the seventy years' captivity, the future of Babylon and of Israel. There is a DOCTRINAL interest — Jeremiah's teaching on God, the Kingdom, Sin, Repentance, Judgment, the Messiah, the New Covenant. Personal Responsibility, Redemption, Destiny. This is a Book to be known and loved."2 Jeremiah's message was one of national condemnation because Judah had forsaken Jehovah (2:13); it was a call for national retribution, for sin pays wages whether to nations or individuals (16:9, 13; 25:2); and it included national consolation, for repentance brings blessing (30-33).

As directed by the Lord, Jeremiah used many object lessons in teaching the people: the almond rod (1); the boiling caldron (1); the marred girdle (13); the full bottle (13); the drought (14); the potter's vessel, (18); the broken bottle (19); two baskets of figs (24); bonds and bars (27); buying a field (32); the hidden stones (43); and the book cast into the Euphrates River (51).

The book of Jeremiah abounds in texts for preachers: forsaking a fountain for a broken cistern (2:13); false and unskillful personal dealing (6:14); the old paths are the best paths (6:16); lost opportunities (8:20); what to glory in (9:24); the need of regeneration (13:13); the Lord a stranger (14:8); premature decay (15:9); the Word of God (15:16; 33:29); the condition of the human heart by nature (17:9); a second chance here (18:4); righteousness personified (23:6); and other significant texts such as 24:7; 31:16, 31-34; 33:3; and 49:11.

Jeremiah alone of all the books in the Bible declares that the Ark of the Covenant will have no place in restored Israel (3:16); “rising up early and speaking” is a phrase which occurs 11 times and is found only in Jeremiah with the exception of 2 Chronicles 36:15, which Ezra the scribe probably borrowed from Jeremiah; and it contains that unique phrase, “the generation of His wrath” (7:29). And then there is the expression, “neither could they blush” (8:12), a charge that the Israelites had lost their ability to blush, so shameless was their sin.

Jeremiah’s prayers are also worthy of study (see 1:6; 4:10; 12:1-4; 14:7, 8, 11, 21; 15; 17:13-18; 18:13-18; 20:7; 32:16-25).

While the book of Jeremiah is largely a combination of history, biography and prophecy, the various events recorded are not in chronological order.

Jeremiah himself is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ weeping over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34-35), even as in the book itself Christ is pictured as the Fountain of Living Waters (2:13); the Great Physician (8:22); the Good Shepherd (31:10; 23:4); the Righteous Branch (23:5); David the King (30:9); the Redeemer (50:34); and the Lord our Righteousness (23:6).

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, pp. 191-92.

Ezekiel

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of The Major Prophets

Ezekiel: The Book of Hope

Key Word: Glory.

Message: “The goodness and severity of God” (Robert Lee).1 Key Verse: 12:27 —”Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.”

Introduction

Ezekiel, which means “God strengthens,” was taken into the Babylonian captivity with Jehoiachin in 599 B.C., being then about 25 years old. He belonged to the aristocracy of Jerusalem and, like Jeremiah, he was a priest as well as a prophet (1:1-3). However, because of the captivity he never served as a priest, but he began his prophetic ministry at 30 — the age when priests entered upon their sacred duties. Having commenced his prophecy in the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s captivity, he continued his ministry for at least 22 years (592-570 B.C.; cf. 1:2; 24:17). Ezekiel resided in his own house in Babylon (8:1) and was married, but his wife died in the year when the final siege of Jerusalem began (24:18). He was contemporary with Jeremiah and Daniel. Jeremiah, who spoke to the remnant that remained in the land, was soon to pass from the scene; Daniel spoke to the

captives who had been brought to the rivers of Babylon. While the captives wept by Babylon's rivers at the memory of Zion, an experience graphically depicted in Psalm 137, Ezekiel was exulting in the glorious visions given to him by God.

Numerous Bible commentators have pointed out that Ezekiel stresses the Spirit, Isaiah the Son, and Jeremiah the Father. Ezekiel was the great artist, Isaiah the great poet, and Jeremiah the great preacher. Still another comparison treats Ezekiel as the exile prophet of hope, Isaiah as the statesman prophet of faith, and Jeremiah as the martyr prophet of love.

During the first years of the captivity false prophets had led the people to believe that Jerusalem would not be destroyed, and that they would soon be restored to the land and the Holy City. Having been informed of this, Jeremiah wrote and sent a letter to Babylon stating that the city would be destroyed (Jer. 29). It was the following year that Ezekiel began his ministry and confirmed all that Jeremiah had said, warning the people that before they could ever hope to return to Jerusalem they must return to the Lord. Ezekiel's task was a difficult one. Though at first he met with great opposition, ultimately his labors were crowned with success, the people's return to the Lord and to the land having been largely the fruit of his ministry.

The style and method of Ezekiel were unique. In fact, he was not unlike a modern day flagpole sitter in literally acting out various parts of his prophetic ministry, and this, in order to get the attention of a people who would not listen to him or to his message. Thus symbolic action often supplied the text for his message, as in the mimic

siege of Jerusalem (4). In addition to this there are visions (8), similitudes (16), parables (17), poems (19), proverbs (12:22-23; 18:2), allegories (16, 23), and prophecies (6, 20, 40-48).

It may be said that Ezekiel prophesied in what were the darkest days of the nation of Israel, having had to cope with the false hope given by false prophets, coupled with the resultant indifference and despondency issuing out of days of sin and disaster.

Today few even bother to read Ezekiel's prophecy, mainly because they do not understand its key, structure and message. Like Daniel and the Apostle John, Ezekiel prophesied outside of the land and each wrote an apocalypse. Though employing highly symbolic language, they were given to see the sure hope and shining glory of the Lord which shall be the experience and portion of Israel in that coming day. Ezekiel saw the Shekinah Glory of the Lord leave the earthly temple, but he was also projected into the future millennial kingdom and saw the return of that same glory to the new temple, having seen and recorded many other details of the future as well.

W. Graham Scroggie has noted: "The Book begins with Heavenly Glory, in the Cherubic Vision (ch. i); it ends with Earthly Glory, in the vision of the New Order (chs. xl.-xlviii.); and in between, it tells of the Departing Glory (viii.4; ix.3; x.4, 18, 19; xi.22, 23). The idea of Glory runs through the whole Prophecy, and, in a sense, characterizes it."2 Ezekiel looked beyond "the sufferings of Christ" to "the glory (lit. glories) that should follow" (1 Pet. 1:11).

Outline

1. THE GLORY OF THE LORD AND THE DENUNCIATION OF JUDAH (1-24; 592-588 B.C.; 4 ½ years)

2. THE GLORY OF THE LORD AND THE VISITATION OF THE NATIONS (25-32; 588-586 B.C.; 2 years)

3. THE GLORY OF THE LORD AND THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (33-48; 586-572 B.C.; 14 years)

Notable Notes

"Ezekiel," wrote Guy H. King, "is a book largely neglected, not often read. Of course, it bristles with difficulties, yet it abounds in treasures. It is a deep well of truth …"3 There are at least 25 references to the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel (e.g., 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24).

The full details of the future new temple (40-47), and of the new river (47), are revealed only by Ezekiel, coupled with the fact that he was given to see the same city the Apostle John saw later which is called, "The Lord is there" (48:35).

It is alone in this great prophetic book that Satan's past history before his fall is disclosed (28:11-19).

Ezekiel has been called "the prophet of reconstruction," and so he was (cf. 36-37). He virtually took up where Jeremiah left off, having developed the theme of Israel's future. Along with Jeremiah, he shares the distinction of promulgating the doctrine of individual responsibility, although he gives this theme an emphasis all his own (cf. 18 with Jer. 31:29-30).

The dominating notes of Ezekiel's ministry are sin, punishment, repentance and blessing. The burden of his

soul was to destroy false hopes and to awaken true ones. The most familiar phrase of the book is, “They shall know that I am Jehovah” (at least 70 times; see chs. 25-32 in particular). The key phrase of the prophecy, “the glory of the Lord,” occurs 14 times in the first 11 chapters.

Ezekiel speaks of Israel in Egypt more than any other prophet, and it is only in this book that Israel’s idolatry in Egypt is learned, and of God’s thought to destroy them because of it (20:1-9).

In summary fashion, Scroggie has perceptively commented as follows: “Isaiah had blown the silver trumpet over Jerusalem, Jeremiah was playing the mournful flute in Judah, and Ezekiel was striking the iron harp by the Chebar. This prophet has not the sustained flight of Isaiah, nor the tenderness of Jeremiah, but there is a directness which is common only to stern natures.”4 In Ezekiel the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as the SON OF MAN, and further, as the “PRINCE” of Ezekiel’s prophecy.

Odds and Ends

Some time ago the editor was asked if the Bible studies which appear in “From the Editor’s Notebook” are written by me. Yes, they are, including the current article on Ezekiel. If material appearing in my column has not been written by me, then I try to be careful always to identify the source. In some instances, however, I can only place at the end of a quotation or brief article: Author Unknown or Selected.

As you know from your reading of “Food for the Flock,” I still wrestle with occasional typos. As indicated in a past

issue, I am unable to proofread the final setup work before the magazine goes to press. This is a great disadvantage but something that cannot be helped. As it is, I generally proofread the galley sheets three times before returning them to the printer. Perhaps in the future arrangements can be made to pay someone at Midland Printers Company Ltd., to carefully go over each issue just before it goes to press. The present proofreading responsibility rests entirely on my shoulders and, be assured, my perfectionist ways feel keenly each typo. One glaring typo, which virtually drove me up the wall and across the ceiling, appeared in the 30th anniversary issue. The word “not” was inserted on page 23 in the last paragraph, totally changing the meaning of what was intended. A check of the original material showed that it was not my fault, but such is little comfort once the die has been cast (Jan.-Feb. 1985 issue).

In the will of the Lord, I expect to spend most of October in Peterborough, Ontario, to again teach a course on 1 CORINTHIANS at Kawartha Lakes Bible School. This will extend through the last day of the month. A number of changes are being implemented at the school this year in order to make room for a growing enrollment of students. If you would like to receive information about KLBS, please feel free to write to: Mr. Daniel Degeer, Kawartha Lakes Bible School, Box 1101, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7H4.

The Annual Meeting of our “Food for the Flock” committee members is scheduled for Saturday, October 26th, in Toronto at Don Valley Bible Chapel.

“Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thess. 5:25).

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p. 203.

3 Guy H. King, A Day At a Time, p. 27.

4 Scroggie, op. cit., p. 202.

Daniel

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of The Major Prophets

Daniel: The Book of Divine Dominion

Key Word: Dominion.

Message: “The Universal Sovereingty of God” (Robert Lee).1 Key Verse: 2:22 — “He revealeth the deep and secret things; He knoweth what is the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him.”

Introduction

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), an English mathematician and philosopher who formulated the binomial theorem, the laws of gravity and motion, and the elements of differential calculus, said that “Daniel is the most distinct in order of time, and easiest to be understood; and therefore, in those things which relate to the last times, he must be made the key to the rest.”

W. Graham Scroggie has significantly stated that “the Book of Daniel is a Prophetic Philosophy of History, and is the greatest book in the Bible on Godless Kingdoms and the Kingdom of God. These are portrayed in chapter ii, from the human standpoint, by a dream; and in chapter vii, from the Divine standpoint, by visions. In the one view the world’s kingdoms are likened to a power-Colossus, and in the other view, to four vicious Beasts.”2 Like Ezekiel, Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was a Jewish captive in Babylon. It is believed

that he belonged to a family of high rank, if not the Royal House, and that he was taken captive at the age of 16, eight years before Ezekiel. If this is an accurate picture of things, and it appears to be so, then Daniel was carried away as a captive in the first invasion of Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar (606 B.C.; cf. 1:1-3), while Ezekiel was taken captive in the second invasion. From the time of his capture, Daniel spent his whole life in Babylon (1:21), a period of 69 years, and in a sordidly sinful court he lived a holy life, so much so that in Ezekiel's prophecy he is referred to as a model of righteousness (14:14-20; 28:3). In addition to Ezekiel, his contemporaries were Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Obadiah.

Actually, the book of Daniel is not among the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, but is one of the five "Latter Writings" (Kethubim), the others being Ezra, and 1 & 2 Chronicles. As to its contents, the book is historical, prophetical and apocalyptical, the historical section occupying about half of it. While Daniel wrote for the Jews in captivity, and for generations unborn, his main theme deals with "the times of the Gentiles," his book dealing more fully with the Gentile nations than with his own nation, Israel (see Luke 21:24). In Daniel 3 there is the prophecy of the 70 weeks which actually began with the restoration of Jerusalem in the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes (9:25 — 445 B.C.). Evidently, the "wise men from the east" knew the prophecy of Daniel. A portion of the book is written in Aramaic (2:4 -7:28), the language of the Gentiles of that day.

Daniel served and rose to prominence under four kings and three nations: Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar (Chaldea), Darius (Media) and Cyrus (Persia). The

events recorded in Daniel cover at least 70 years, Daniel himself having undoubtedly been over 90 years old at the time of his death.

The Lord Jesus Christ set His seal upon this great book as inspired of God (Matt. 24:15), His own title, “Son of Man,” being based on 7:13.

The prophecies of Daniel are among the most remarkable in all the Bible, having special importance today. The key message of the book concerns the universal sovereignty of God or, as G. Campbell Morgan has called it, the “Persistent Government of God in the Government of the World.”3 Thus the primary object of the prophecy is the contrasting of God’s infinite power with the finite world-power of men. In addition to the main message of the book, there are other important messages as well:

1. The Lord’s faithful and obedient servants are often blessed with worldly success (1:9, 20; 2:48-49).

2. Such are trusted with His secrets (2:19, 22, 47).

3. In times of great suffering and distress such have the comfort of His blessed presence (3:25).

4. The book of Daniel sounds a loud warning against sinful pride (4:30-37).

5. The book holds a definite warning to those who fail to honor and glorify God (5:22-23).

Outline

1. Historical (1-6)

2. Prophetical (7-12)

Notable Notes

The empires introduced in the book of Daniel are the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman.

The theme of the book is summed up in 2:44.

One of the chief values of the book is the portrait of Daniel himself, one of the great passages being his prayer in chapter 9. As for the man Daniel, there is not a single blot recorded against him in the Scriptures, reminding us of Joseph. Daniel was a man of:

1. Purity (1).

2. Purpose (1:8).

3. Principle (1:8).

4. Prayer (2; 6; 9; 10).

5. Perseverance (1:21).

6. Power (2:48).

7. Prosperity (6:28).

In reading and studying a book like Daniel, it should be kept in mind that the great purpose of Bible prophecy is that we might realize, in a practical way, the certainty of coming glories. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that a person see the forest as well as the individual trees.

H. P. Barker tells of an 18-yearold boy who, being deeply interested in scientific subjects, was one day given a telescope by his father. Having a keen interest in optics, he began to study the telescope, examining each part, and never did use it for the purpose for which it had been given to him. He was studying the telescope instead of the studying the heavens!

Let us not get so involved in the pursuit of the mechanics of Bible study relative to its many prophecies that we miss in turn their practical message for our hearts and lives. Rather, let us be like Abraham who, upon learning of Jehovah's purpose regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, humbly sought the Lord's face in earnest intercession (see Gen. 18).

Daniel's visions sweep the entire course of Gentile world-rule to its catastrophic climax, and to the ultimate establishing of the coming Messianic kingdom.

It is noteworthy that Daniel was "greatly beloved" by the Lord (9:23; 10:11, 19), and so are we today who truly know the Lord (Eph. 2:4).

In the book of Daniel the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as the SMITING STONE (2:36-49; cf. Matt. 21:44; 1 Pet. 2:6-8).

Later Years

Recently, in my day to day reading, I came across some thought provoking statements by Malcolm Muggeridge, written when past his 75th year. For years Mr. Muggeridge was editor of the British satirical weekly, Punch, but then rather late in life was reached by the transforming Gospel of God's grace and brought into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what he wrote:

"When I look back on my life nowadays, which I sometimes do, what strikes me most forcibly is that what seemed at the time most significant seems now most futile and absurd. For instance, success in all of its various guises, being known and praised, ostensible pleasures, making money … In retrospect all these

exercises in self-gratification are diversions designed to distract our attention from the true purpose of our existence in this world; which is, quite simply, to look for God, and in looking to find Him, and having found Him to love Him …"

Still further, Muggeridge wrote: "It is often said that old age is a sort of second childhood. And it's true in a way. One does go back to childhood. For instance, I remember things that happened when I was a child much more clearly and vividly than things that have happened more recently. More often than not, yesterday is totally obliterated, but I can recall exactly happenings as long as fifty or sixty years ago. It is the same with places, with natural scenes like a lovely field, the sheep, the orchard, the sky.

"And then with people, too… Thus, when people see this second childhood as an intimation of senescence, I don't agree. I am more inclined to think of it as a conditioning process for eternity, as accustoming one to the circumstances that one is going to move into. Furthermore, it bears out those sayings of Jesus about how we have to be like a little child to understand His words and to enter His kingdom."

Here, then, is a timely message for those among God's people who have, in a measure of health and strength, reached old age. Muggeridge is stating in no uncertain terms that the Lord has given to some of His saints the experience of advanced years for the express purpose of developing a clearer, sharper perspective and focus on God Himself, and this, with a view to seeking, knowing, finding and loving Him who chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, 1, p. 199.

3 J. Vernon McGee, Briefing the Bible, p. 47.